

Institution:	GOLDSMITHS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
Unit of Assessment:	36: Communication, Cultural and Media Studies
Title of case study:	Influencing the Growth of 'Fashion Start-ups' and 'Young Creative' Self-Employment in Europe
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)	

Angela McRobbie, Professor of Communications at Goldsmiths since 1998, is an expert on urban fashion start-ups. Her research chimes with government interest in self-employment among 'young creatives'. It has shaped policy and thinking at the DCMS and London Fashion Week, and the Centre for Fashion Enterprise in East London. She has played a direct role in the development of start-ups in Germany, Austria and Italy across the full range of creative industries. Many of her now classic articles are key references in policy debate, and her original work has 'handbook status' for young independent fashion designers. She has shaped thinking on newcomers and start-ups in the context of high youth unemployment across Europe, on the rise of 'new fashion cities' and on urban cultural policies including Fashion Weeks.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)
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Angela McRobbie has been employed at Goldsmiths since 1998 when she was appointed as Professor of Communications. Her research on the working practices of young fashion designers trained in the UK and based in London began in the 1990s with a key 1998 monograph *British Fashion Design*, and has been developed and extended ever since [examples at 1, 2]. In the early 2000s she took part in the Cultural Entrepreneurs Club hosted at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London with sponsorship from Goldsmiths, the DCMS, Channel 4 and Smirnoff. This series of events for up to 500 'young creatives' based in the capital consolidated much of McRobbie's London-based work and resulted in her most often cited article 'Clubs to Companies', which has been translated and reprinted in many books and journals across the world [3].

The next phase of her research involved artist interviews, studio visits, an email survey and a questionnaire of 120 artists (see articles [4,5] and BBC Radio 4 below). Meanwhile an Atelier Europa Project, 'Be Creative', funded by the German Federal Cultural Programme from 2000 to 2002, led to a show in Munich, a day conference, booklets and other publications.

Since 2008 McRobbie's research has taken the form of two distinct urban case studies: the Berlin fashion start-up scene, and London creative multi-taskers and cultural entrepreneurs. It uses the format of the 'creative career biography', which comprises recorded interviews carried out over several studio visits, observational periods, and hosted events, roundtables, workshops, one-to-one meetings and social occasions. This extensive material is regularly updated through email exchanges with respondents. McRobbie's work uses qualitative methods, interviews and observation. It is longitudinal in character, enabling her to trace her respondents through the various stages of their careers.

In 2010, McRobbie initiated ethnographic research on Berlin fashion start-ups, with particular reference to female self-employment strategies. In this context she has interviewed and taken part in deep immersive observation with more than 20 fashion designers. She hosted a tailor-made event titled Fashion Matters Berlin in June 2012 at the September Gallery in Kreuzberg (with Goldsmiths support), attended by editors and journalists from Women's Wear Daily (Germany) and by Tanja Muehlhans, member of the Berlin Senate. The initial results of this ethnography of fashion micro-economies and of working life as a Berlin-based designer were published in *Cultural Studies* in 2012/13 [6] and are already cited in the Berlin policy world, for example by the CEO of Inpolis/NEMONA as described below.

McRobbie also hosted a roundtable event at Goldsmiths on 24 June 2013, which was attended by over 50 people, including one of the designers from her original London study from 1998, as well as journalists and policy advisors. In addition, two Berlin designers and fashion company directors attended, as did a representative of the Italian fashion industry Chamber of Commerce, the Camera della Nazionale Moda. One of the intentions of the research and roundtables such as this is to use

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the insight from the policies implemented in Berlin to inform the new generation of fashion start ups in London and the UK. The London ‘multi-taskers’ interviews are reported in McRobbie’s forthcoming book *Be Creative? Making a Living in the New Cultural Industries* (Polity, 2014). Ongoing research on Glasgow visual artists and pop musicians using a similar methodology will be published in 2016.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Evidence of the quality of the research: All of these research outputs (especially the much-cited article at [3]) are publications of international significance.

All outputs are available in hard copy on request from the Goldsmiths Research Office.

1. McRobbie A (2000) Fashion as a Culture Industry. In (eds.) S. Bruzzi and P.C. Gibson, *Fashion Cultures* (pp 253–264). London: Routledge.
2. McRobbie A (2002) From Holloway to Hollywood: Happiness at Work in the Cultural Economy? In (eds.) P. Du Gay and M. Pryke, *Cultural Economy* (pp 97-114). London: Sage.
3. McRobbie A (2002) Clubs to Companies: Notes on the Decline of Political Culture in Speeded-up Creative Worlds. *Cultural Studies* 16, 516–31.
DOI: 10.1080/09502380210139070 (translated and reprinted five times)
4. McRobbie A (2004) “I Was Knitting Away Night and Day”: Die Bedeutung von Kunst und Handwerk in Modesdesign. In (ed.) M. von Osten, *Norm der Abweichung* (pp 99-119). Zürich: Springer.
5. McRobbie A (2004) Everyone is Creative: Artists as Pioneers of the New Economy. In (eds.) E.B. Silva and T. Bennett, *Contemporary Culture and Everyday Life* (pp 186-202) Durham: sociology press.
6. McRobbie A (2013) Fashion Matters Berlin: City-Spaces, Women’s Working Lives, New Social Enterprise? *Cultural Studies* 27, 982–1010 [online late 2012]. REF output – details in REF2.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

McRobbie’s longitudinal, case-study based and qualitative research methodology has involved her in forming long-term collaborative partnerships and associations with the small companies and organisations she studies. The closeness of these relationships is encouraged by its feminist and egalitarian ethic. Its impact is typically implemented by the same individuals who are the subjects of her research, within the design studio itself or in the immediate office environment. In effect, McRobbie becomes an in-house social scientist and professional researcher, often contributing to catalogue essays and reports, writing for artistic and curatorial projects in Berlin, working with organisations and policy advisers across Europe, and presenting at seminars and roundtables in London and the UK, in Germany and Austria, and in Italy. Specific impacts on fashion companies, organisations and individuals are described in more detail below.

In London and the UK

McRobbie has been a respected figure in the UK fashion world since the early 2000s, known for a localised and social approach to sustainable careers in fashion design. In recent years, with the economic recession and with the new generation of start-ups, her original recommendations for a more collaborative ‘fashion centre’ model, first made in 1998–2000, have found a fresh place in the policy agenda. This model encourages young designers, with low levels of capital and investment, to work together, sharing both expensive equipment and knowledge about suppliers and producers. And because McRobbie has widened the range of her research in the last decade to include fashion multi-taskers and other ‘young creatives’, her work has also informed various other start-up styles of working. Examples include the small graphic design company ‘rebeccaandmike’ in London, globally renowned fashion company Wah Nails, Susie Stone Bespoke Womenswear London, and new fashion label Teilja London.

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The CEO of [Wah Nails](#) (also a Nike Consultant and Fashion Stylist) has acknowledged her debt to the ideas expressed in [3], arguing for commercial independence from sponsorship or artist/fashion grants from the public purse. In response to [1] she changed her working practices, embarking on multi-tasking rather than single fashion-design practice [7].

McRobbie's research has shaped policy and thinking at the Departure for Culture, Media and Sport, as well as London Fashion Week; and it has been highly influential on London's pioneering fashion business incubator the [Centre for Fashion Enterprise](#), as well as the [Trampery](#), the London-based social enterprise founded in 2009 that encourages entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation. Two BBC Radio 4 programmes have drawn extensively on her research on the creative industries in the UK: a dedicated edition of Thinking Allowed presented by Laurie Taylor (January 2005) and a three-part series on the History of the British Art School presented by Jarvis Cocker in 2008 ('The Art of Pop', produced by Bob Dickinson).

McRobbie also worked closely with NESTA during the 2000s, in particular with Siân Prime who implemented many of her proposals with dozens of fashion designers. Subsequently Prime joined the Goldsmiths Institute of Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship, and they have together been the driving force behind a recently-launched [MA in Fashion](#), which brings a critical perspective to debate with creative practitioners – designers, writers, thinkers and curators – who actively seek to challenge traditional boundaries. In this way education and research directly come to bear on professional practice.

In Germany and Austria

McRobbie's fashion recommendations have been published in Europe and translated into German, appearing in a number of journals, newspapers and books. They have helped to shape some of the start-ups mentioned below. In Berlin in particular since 2008, her research fed into discussions about how under-utilised city spaces ('Zwischennutzungen') could be turned into fashion start-up social enterprises, with subsidized rents for 'socially worthy' projects. McRobbie's proposals to bring together groups of young designers and to encourage more cooperation with local suppliers and with pools of available labour with regard to knitting, sewing, crocheting etc. have come to fruition, especially in the Berlin neighbourhood of Neukölln. This happened because policy advisors, urban consultants, designers and entrepreneurs themselves were familiar with her writing and research, both in English and in translation.

Published in an influential German volume, "I Was Knitting Away Night and Day": Die Bedeutung von Kunst und Handwerk in Modedesign' [4] became a key text for policy-makers and fashion producers in Berlin, influencing the model of co-operative working among small-scale fashion designers as a recommended pathway for economic viability. The article cited at [3] was also widely read in English by German urban policy-makers. Directly influenced by this work were such organisations as Inpolis (especially its [NEMONA](#) network for fashion designers and seamstresses) [8], [Common-Works ModeProduktion](#) (providing fashion production services for 30 Berlin-based fashion design companies) [9], and the film production company [Turanskyj & Ahlrichs GbR](#).

In 2010 McRobbie initiated local neighbourhood ethnographic research on Berlin fashion start-ups, with particular reference to female self-employment strategies. Also important to this research is the NGO dimension, including ways of working with local migrant women in a more equitable and socially engaged way. In this context she has interviewed and taken part in deep immersive observation with fashion designers based at the Common-Works Studio and the Inpolis/NEMONA studio in Neukölln, as well as with the sewing workshop or 'co-sewing space' [NadelWald](#). The Managing Director of Common-Works has used this research to extend the feminist social enterprise outreach dimension of the company [9], while the CEO of Inpolis is committed to a collaboration that reflects the social egalitarian model of fashion co-working [8, described in 6]. Such work has led to McRobbie being invited to join the Neukölln Neighbourhood Fashion Forum.

In June 2012 McRobbie organised, hosted and introduced in German a tailor-made event entitled Fashion Matters Berlin. Held at the September Gallery in Kreuzberg with Goldsmiths support, it brought McRobbie into contact with designers and labels such as Issever Bahri and Augustin Teboul as well as with influential journalists such as Maria Exner, the fashion editor of the major German newspaper *Die Zeit*, and the German correspondent for *Women's Wear Daily* [10].

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McRobbie's articles listed above were highly influential on the Director of Espace-Surplus Le Grand Berlin, and they helped shape the contours of the cultural enterprise and feminist organisation entitled 'f***** – Towards New Perspectives on Feminism' [11]. One result of the collaboration was a major three-day gallery event of this name, held in February 2013 at n.b.k. (Neuer Berliner Kunstverein), which received extensive publicity in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and elsewhere [12]. An ongoing joint commitment is to the AHRC CREAtE Programme (Fashion IP workstream), drawing on the collaborator's legal expertise in Berlin. The workstream was launched on 24 June 2013 with a symposium entitled 'Fashion Matters in Times of Globalisation and Digitalisation: City Spaces, Designers, Producers, Supply Chains, Technology and IP' [13].

Leading out of these initiatives on a more permanent basis is a new network – Fashion Matters Berlin – which McRobbie initiated in 2013. This is already developing several additional research and policy strands, alongside her involvement in the AHRC CREAtE programme. In addition, she has regularly taken part in fashion policy and creative start-up roundtables in Munich and Vienna.

NGOs in Germany and Italy

McRobbie has collaborated since the early 1990s with EU-funded feminist/green NGOs, including the long established [Life e.V.](#) in Berlin and BBJ Germany/Italy Consultancy Services (now [share.it](#)) in Germany and Italy – both not-for-profits founded in 1988, specialising in vocational training and employment support for young people and under-40s across Europe. More recently McRobbie has connected these two organisations with the new generation of fashion and creative start-ups in Berlin and Milan; she is currently on the Scientific Advisory Board of share-it [14, 15].

She has again widened the net of this research to include 'creative multi-taskers' and this has led to her work being influential at municipal level in Sicily and in Umbria. The article listed at [3] informed and helped to shape the design and implementation of two EU Social Fund Projects with field-work programmes in Italy and Germany. Both projects aimed at enhancing the employability of young people through media and arts training with 'insertion' or paid internships in small media and cultural enterprises. McRobbie played a key role in the four-year EU Social Fund STEP programme in Palermo: Territorial School for Emergent Artists, which mentored 40 youngsters in Palermo into new creative work [16]. She also worked closely with young artists and designers who participated in the BEKORE EU Vocational Mobility Project in Berlin and Spoleto in 2009–2012, presenting a report at the final conference for the project in Berlin [17].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

All sources listed below are available in hard or electronic copy on request from Goldsmiths Research Office.

7. CEO, Wah Nails, Dalston, London [contact details provided separately].
8. Managing Director, Inpolis, Berlin [contact details provided separately].
9. Managing Director, Common-Works ModeProduktion, Berlin [contact details provided separately].
10. Symposium [description](#).
11. Director, Espace-Surplus Le Grand Berlin [contact details provided separately].
12. Symposium [announcement](#) and [programme](#). *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 January 2013, pp. 31, 34, 35 (including 'Die Rückkehr der Sexualpolitik' by McRobbie under the heading 'Frauen, Wie Wollen Wir Leben?'). The complete press coverage is available [online](#) (McRobbie on p. 5).
13. Symposium [announcement](#).
14. Director, Life e.V., Berlin [contact details provided separately].
15. Director, BBJ Germany/Italy Consultancy Services (now share.it), Spoleto [contact details provided separately]; [Scientific Advisory Board](#).
16. Final [report](#), pp. 40–52.
17. BEKORE [project description](#); final [brochure](#); recorded [interviews](#).